



72 HOURS OF  
ACCOUNTABILITY

**PG 3**

THE GREAT NILKHET  
EXPERIMENT

**PG 4**



# IS EDUCATION (STILL) A PRIVILEGE?

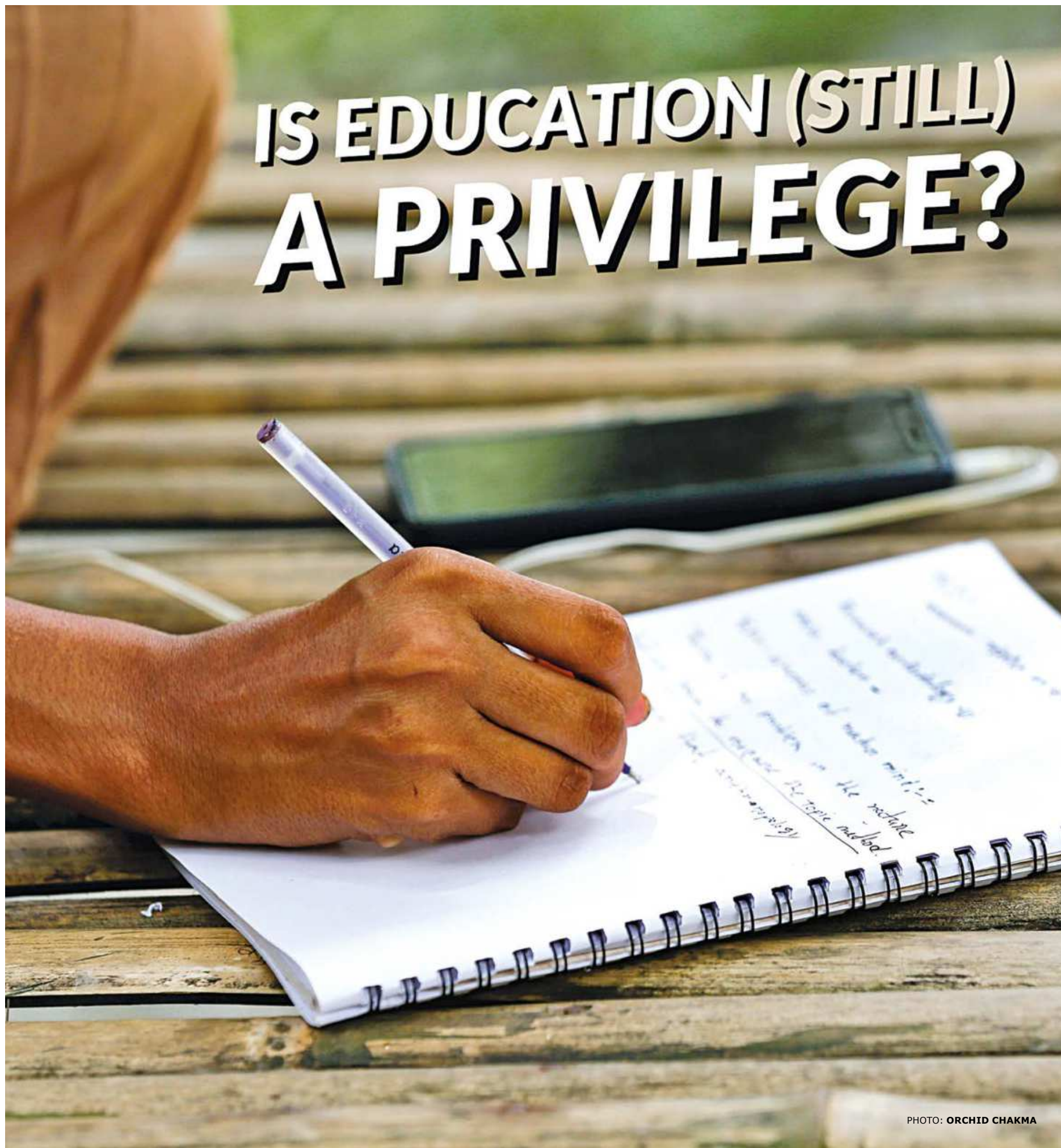


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



# EDITORIAL

I was five when I first visited Cox's Bazar. We took a train from Kamalapur, and I was super stoked, so much so that I unboxed and wore my special watch. However, calamity struck when I opened a window, and the strap got loose and the watch slipped off. I panicked, and tried to stop the train. But it was hard to pull the handle, in the cold November train.

My exams are going on right now. I have bad habits when it comes to studying. I procrastinate and cram. Problems arise when my head stops working the morning of the exam. Last week, I showed up at university barefeet. It was hard to put on sandals, for my cold November brain.

My first taste of betrayal as a child was when I read in a book that the October revolution happened in November, 1917. It had something to do with mismatched calendars. I guess it was hard to keep the schedule, when breaking November chains.

My ex's birthday was this month. I was sad that day. It made me think, will I be sad the day she gets married? What if she invites me? Will it be in November? I think it'll be hard to enter the pandal, with my cold November pain.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



## PLAYWATCH

### MUSIC



## Porcupine Tree break their 12-year-long silence

**SABIH SAFWAT**

Porcupine Tree is a name every fan of progressive rock has heard, and at least half of them love. Okay, I may be exaggerating, but just a little.

Formed by Steven Wilson in 1987, the band has gifted us with many timeless progressive rock records like *Deadwing*, *Fear of a Blank Planet*, *In Absentia* and *The Sky Moves Sideways* to name a few. Porcupine Tree is all about masterful songwriting, especially the way they incorporate acoustic sections into their progressive rock and progressive metal songs.

Recently, until now that is, the band was on hiatus because Wilson felt that they had explored everything possible with their chemistry, and wanted to cover new grounds. Mostly electronica, as it had turned out. However, he has now decided that he's ready to get back into progressive rock, and Porcupine Tree, with a fresh perspective and new found inspiration.

Released on November 1, their new single "Harridan" is a throwback to the *Fear of a Blank Planet* musical style, with the dampened, explosive lead guitar riffage. Some techniques from Wilson's post-PT solo works are also prominent, like the aggressive bassline and poppy chorus. An eight-minute long track with unconventional structure, the dynamics are fleshed out in the song distinctly between acoustic and lead-driven sections.

Gavin Harrison's ornate drum grooves and fills keep the song tight,

driving the flow just right. I do miss Colin Edwin; his bouncy bass lines were one of the definitive traits of the band's sound, and I'd take it over the crunchy and curt bass in "Harridan" every time.

Personally, I love the clean post-chorus the most about this track. The mournful words, crooned over the extended chord progression, make it quite touching.

The band has also announced a new album to be released in June 2022, titled *Closure/Continuation*. Judging from the name, the reunion probably won't be a one-record get-together. "Harridan" was based on material written years ago, and the band has announced that other old drafts will get the same treatment. But the seven-month delay until the release of the record also gives hope for completely new tracks.

In the track list teased on Porcupine Tree's official website, there are seven entries with "Harridan" being the first and the other six veiled behind question marks. Something to note is that the tracks are numbered as

"One, one."

"One, two."

"Two, one."

"Two, two." And so on.

I sense a concept album coming but only time can tell.

Sabih Safwat is a proud prog snob. Suggest him artists at [sabihsafwat@gmail.com](mailto:sabihsafwat@gmail.com)

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# 72 HOURS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

ARYAH JAMIL

On November 11, the Dhaka 7th Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression acquitted the five men accused, who were later acquitted of raping two women at the Raintree Hotel in Banani. Judge Mosammat Kamrunnagar, who has been consequently stripped of judicial powers at the time of writing this article, had stated "Semen cannot be traced after 72 hours" and directed the authorities to not accept any cases of rape after 72 hours.

This statement sparked outrage as activists, students and more took to the streets in protest.

The statement reduces rape to a crime that can only occur on the premise of ejaculation by the perpetrator(s). Placing a time period on the legality of rape and sexual violence breeds a culture of impunity. It is terrifying to think there is a time limit after which crimes are legalised.

Due to the conventional mindset of an overwhelmingly traditionalist Bangladeshi society, shame and social stigma exist around reporting an incident, deeming it as a "personal/familial matter." We often have to fight physically and emotionally abusive families before even reaching a police station. When sexual violence is shrouded in the privacy of homes, the patterns of violence fail to be identified.

When those who exist to protect your rights choose to shield the perpetrators, it is virtually impossible to get justice. The prioritisation and protection of male reputations is a painful and infuriating reality. It is exhausting to have to live in a political climate where my value as a citizen is diminished because of my gender and where I must constantly be in an act of radical rebellion to receive human rights.

It is inhumane to ask a deeply traumatised person to comprehend the violent acts that have been committed against them and report that to authorities within 72 hours who may disregard you as a "waste of time." Capital punishment satiates nothing but our desire for instant gratification.

This statement absolves any sense of any legal protection gender minorities have. We are enraged at the way the judicial system chooses to vilify our emotions and anger. We are tired and yet continue to fight for our rights every day. We are tired of the judicial system morally policing us and our characters being evaluated as if a personality trait would make us worthy of sexual violence. The violence we face at the hands of men is sourced in the incompetence of our academic institutions, professional workplaces, families, the government and society at large. These institutions aren't nameless faceless bodies. They are individuals; individuals who repeatedly inflict violence upon us and we demand individual accountability from each of them.

As a minority, I am ashamed of what the institutions set in place to protect me have come to. To know that my character certificate will decide the guilt of the perpetrator, to know I am not safe in any legal sphere and will be harassed and judged while navigating a near impossible judicial system often without representation, to know that men with privilege and sons of wealthy business owners are chosen over my bodily autonomy and to know that my government has failed me every step of the way isn't shocking but frustrating and disappointing.

*Aryah Jamil is mediocre at everything except laughing at her own jokes Tell her to stop talking at jamil.aryah@gmail.com*



## Where the gender binary fails

TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

At birth, we are labelled as either male or female. What if the label you have been given does not resonate with who you are? To a cisgender person, adherence to this expectation comes naturally. However, that is not the case for everyone.

Tasneem\*, 19, who identifies as a trans woman, shares, "I used to think that my obsession with dressing up in traditionally feminine outfits was weird until a point came when every time I mimicked the mannerisms of masculine men, I felt like an alien in my own body."

Contrary to popular belief, gender is not all about the male or female label. For decades, gender was believed to be an identity centred on social constructs and roles.

The binary concept of gender can be constricting and oppressive to those who cannot identify with one particular gender identity. What the concept of non-binary gender identity does is create space for people by allowing gender to be flexible and fluid rather than definitive and constrictive.

Non-binary gender identity includes people who do not align with their assigned sex (transgender) and also those for whom their gender identity tends to fluctuate depending on context or time, in terms of expression, identity or both (gender-fluid).

Gender identity is not just about expression through performance and behaviour, but about what gender a person associates their inner self with. This is why many non-binary people, when unable to understand or express their gender in a non-conforming manner, feel dysphoria.

Dysphoria is a sense of discomfort in the body of your assigned sex when your gender identity does not align with it.

Model and activist Munroe Bergdorf, who identifies as trans, described it as a disconnect between the mental self-image/identity and the body's physicality. She also stated, "My dysphoria often manifests itself in social anxiety and depression."

Zohan Araz Khan\*, a 21-year-old who identifies as a trans man, shares the experience of gender dysphoria, saying, "I constantly compare myself and my body with every other cis male body and cis male personality – the socially certified way of looking male, the typical male attitude, each and every masculine stereotype. I keep loathing how my body and I don't align with any of it."

While it has been common discourse that these ideas are media jargon and abnormal, or just people trying to "jump on a bandwagon," many have felt out of place and their bodies long before this conversation saw the light of day.

As Zohan says, "Most people think that trans folks casually choose a certain stereotype to live with. No, it's not just the outfit, the hair, the toys – it's so much more. It's *you*. Gender identity doesn't hold a person's entire identity, but it still is a core part of it. No matter how much you force and condition a trans person, they'd know *where* and *how* they fit and where they don't."

Growing up in a society that believes in strict gender roles can make it hard to see past the constructed norm of binary gender identity. However, there is always room for growth.

*\*Names have been changed for privacy.*

*Tazreen's entire existence can be summed up in burgers, books, bad music taste and binge-watching K-drama. Reach her at tazreenzahan@gmail.com*



PHOTO: STAR



# The Great Nilkhet Experiment

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

As a gullible and naive me from the past stood in the crowded alleys of Nilkhet for the first time holding a poorly printed copy of *Crime and Punishment*, I knew I had to buy the book. The shopkeeper asked for 500 taka. Forgetting Amma’s wise words to be sturdy, I made a puppy-face and begged him to make it 400 taka. He did. I came home victorious.

It was only after a friend of mine bought the same book for 190 taka did I truly comprehend the dark lanes of lies, betrayal and treachery that is Nilkhet. So, how do you conquer Dhaka’s very own Diagon Alley?

**TEST THE WATER BEFORE PLUNGING IN** Shopkeepers on the outskirts of the compound will keep poking you and making the outrageous assertion that they have “everything”. Surprise, surprise! They don’t have “everything,” including the particular book you want. So, they’d make you wait, get those books from other shops and sell them to you at a higher price.

You should ask around for prices and say no even if the price seems fair. Remember, in Nilkhet, there’s always something cheaper.

**CONQUER OR BE CONQUERED**

Rule with an iron fist. Use the thumb rule of bargaining – offer half of the asking price. If you’ve learned anything in your years of shopping with your mother, it’s that you should never be afraid to sound ridiculous when bargaining.

A wise customer is always a ridiculous one. Being reasonable is a hint of weakness and Nilkhet never mercies the weak. Be so bold and loud in your approach that Nilkhet realises you’re here to stay.

**TAKE AN EXPERIENCED FRIEND**

Even a conqueror needs their general, their confidante. For conquering Nilkhet, you’ll

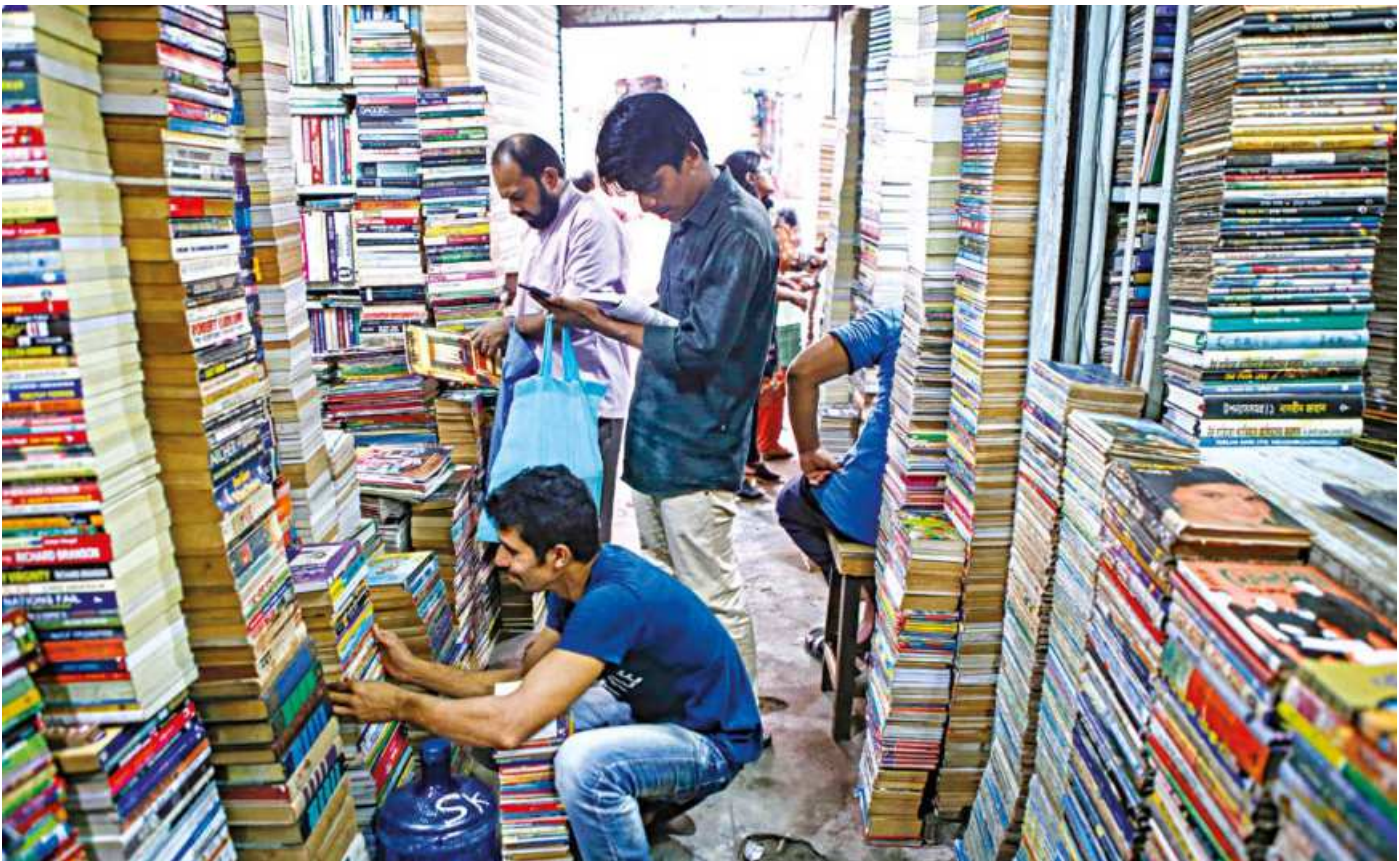


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

need an experienced haggler friend who ravages these wretched lanes.

This friend will take you to their trusted shop in the deepest corners and will also teach you how to get out of the labyrinth. Reading the seller’s mind, establishing personal relations for future prospects, getting you that special discount – this is your buddy.

**BUY OLD BOOKS**

An old book is like the middle child of a

family, neglected yet useful. For a book-worm on a budget like myself, Nilkhet is a glorious haven. If you’re buying a second-hand academic book, not only will you be saving half the money, but you’ll also get some wonderful suggestions and tricks provided by its previous owner.

If you’re aiming for even cheaper, look around for vendors on the footpaths just outside the market. There’s the “everything for 100 taka” dude or the old man near the

intersection selling books more ancient than himself. The books are a bit ragged, but where else would you get five books on ancient Bengal history for 450 bucks? If a self-help book claims to fix your life in 200 pages, Nilkhet can at least make sure you don’t require a penny more than 100 bucks on something as silly as fixing your life.

*Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com*

## Getting into art as an adult

SYEDA TASNIM ISLAM

*In 2020, the year of the quarantine, I got to experience the true joy of a hobby I am passionate about. Up until that point, I had kept myself from ever delving into the world of art simply because, in my mind, I believed I was not good enough.*



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

I remember the exact day I started my first painting. It started with a pep talk from my best friend, “Your life is too long to be afraid of such tiny brushes.” And with that, I got the push I needed to bring out my first ever set of watercolours and got to work. What I realised almost instantaneously was how *easy* it felt.

Skill isn’t a prerequisite, it’s a bonus. My painting was very different from being accurate; it most *definitely* did not resemble a dog (yet it also wasn’t bad enough to be considered an abstract original). Regardless, I was having too much fun to fixate on the flaws. Being able to mix paint, and seeing a previously blank sheet of paper completely transform with colours was awe-inspiring.

Another crucial realisation I had was just how therapeutic art can be. The process forces you to completely tune out your worries, and focus all your attention on one thing for a while. And the best part? You get to create something from scratch.

When I am lost in the process, my mind does not care about whether or not I am creating the “perfect” piece. I know the journey is what truly matters. It’s what builds the final piece, I have no choice but to think about the present moment.

Now, a year later, painting is not only something I keep going back to, but also one that exclusively brings me joy. The more I think about how much I let the made-up mental barriers keep me from something that I now love so much, it seems silly, even unfair.

I was being unfair to myself by holding myself back from something I never even attempted, and I was also being unfair to art itself by placing it on a pedestal and assigning it incredibly arbitrary and narrow values like “good” and “bad.”

The existence of art isn’t to be just another skill to acquire, rather a tool that makes life more enjoyable. It is so you always have something to look forward to, something to enjoy, a pocket of happiness *you* have the power to create when everything else feels too overwhelming.

All this is to say, if you’ve always wanted to try art but your self-doubts made it seem intimidating, it’s time to overcome it. After all, your life is too long to be spent afraid of such tiny brushes.

*Tasnim is currently listening to Mitski on repeat. Send her words of comfort, concern, and help at tasnim.upoma96@gmail.com*

# Is education (still) a privilege?

NAZIFA RAIDAH

As a developing country, when it comes to the education sector, it can be said that Bangladesh has attained massive strides of improvement. From distributing almost 30 crore books annually, for free, to mandating scholarships for the empowerment of the disenfranchised and minority groups, the government has put in some effort to build its nation’s backbone.

However, the presence of children from lower strata of the society on city streets selling flowers, shining shoes or begging makes one ponder – *If education and the Internet is indeed accessible, why aren’t these children at schools?*

The concept of social privilege in education means that an individual with the monetary sufficiency and social status will receive access to the best quality of education. In Bangladesh, education has been socialised so that it reaches the margins. Although it’s easy to assume that expanding access to schooling and increasing quality of education would be directly linked to human capital formation, one may be making the mistake of not taking into consideration the notion of “structural inequality”.

Structural inequality occurs when an ingrained bias exists in the fabric of organisations, institutions, governments, or social networks, which benefits certain members while marginalising others.

According to a 2016 World Bank report, even after 45 years of independence, Bangladesh has remained a country with significant wealth inequality in all of its forms. The wealth of the country is concentrated in the hands of a tiny group of people, depriving the majority of the population. The top ten percent of earners raised their income share from 21 percent in 1984 to 27 percent in 2010. The lowest 10 percent’s income share has dropped from 4.13 percent to 3.99 percent.

Md Iqbal Hossain Mohon, a 31-year-old chauffeur said that in the midst of starting his official job, he wished to finish his education and get a degree. He stated, “I had only completed my education till class five. I wanted to go to night school to get a degree, however, due to being held for long hours in my occupation, I could never attempt to do so.”

When asked what had motivated him to go back to school, he replied, “I always wanted to work as a chauffeur for embassies. However, despite my years of experience, I didn’t fit the applicant criteria since embassies only hire individuals who’ve completed their Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination.”

This is a perpetual problem for the lower income groups of Dhaka. In the quest of a job and a better life, many come from the *mofoshshol* areas (city and district outskirts) and rural regions. However, if they have not fulfilled the required education cap, their fates and the type of jobs they get are already decided for them, which is why the cycle of poverty continues.

Many would assume that the Internet is accessible even for these people, and therefore, education. But if one’s survival is contingent upon their day’s work, even purchasing the amount of Internet

required for educational access could put a sizable dent in their income.

Students coming from this strata often fall off the track by getting involved in local gangs or illicit activities. Moyna, a 29-year-old household worker, said, “Although my elder daughter was able to complete her education, I wasn’t able to complete my youngest’s (son) primary education. He was getting influenced by some local boys and roamed around our slum, skipping school.”

Moyna had to take time off her work to make sure her son didn’t get involved in any gangs and tried enrolling him back to school, time and time again. This goes to show that lower economic class of people aren’t any less aware of the importance of education for their financial and class emancipation.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

“I’ll try to provide every resource my child requires in this regard to ensure they can stand on their own feet. I don’t want them to be barred from opportunities like I was,” added Mohon, about his aspirations for his child.

Another issue to take into account is that many children from lower income groups from rural areas are sent to the cities in order to seek work as household help. Domestic workers were retained in the informal sector by the Labour Act of 2013 and the National Child Labour Elimination Policy of 2010. As a result, this industry is exempt from all government rules and oversight. Especially for women, the problem is much worse given many are married-off once they reach 16 years of age, or even younger.

“Many (girls) are married off since their parents are more concerned that if they are ‘too old’ no one would pursue them

in the future. They are merely teenagers,” said a 44-year old homemaker who chose to remain anonymous. She shared her own experience with a household worker, whom she had provided basic education (reading and writing) to and said, “She grew up in an orphanage and wanted to live freely. So, instead of completing her SSC and HSC, she got married to someone who had shown her some interest. Now she wishes she had completed her education, since she would’ve been able to access better job opportunities and earning, since her husband barely earns enough to sustain them.”

Especially for individuals within the teaching profession, this turns out to be a difficult spot to be in, as they are responsible for spreading literacy. Many teachers have first-hand experience in witnessing

“Especially for women, the lack of education makes them more susceptible to receiving abuse and often not being able to protest, since most of these women become completely dependent on their husbands for their survival,” remarks Makbula.

The issue of privilege also persists for trans individuals, as most, despite receiving tertiary level education, can neither apply to jobs nor receive a sustainable source of income from any institutions.

Shagorika, a trans person who completed her university education from Faridpur, commented, “We’re being denied a right by society, simply because of our gender identities. Most of us resort to begging and some even go as far as to harass individuals for money since it’s almost ‘do or die’ for them.”

education being denied to children who come from a financially poor background. Some of these teachers take up the mantle of educating these children employed within their households.

Makbula Haque, a senior teacher at a local school, said, “It’s both a state level and individual incentive issue if children still have to work in our homes. They should be in schools, since without a degree, no one pays the same heed to a person, even if they’ve acquired the skills in the sector they’re applying to.”

Makbula had taught a few of the minor household workers basic English, Bangla and Mathematics. Some of them wished to continue their education from an institution after they reached an intermediate level of understanding in Bangla and English. However, when they reached 15/16 years, the parents would come knocking to get them married off.

It cannot be safely concluded if the measures that are being taken by the state are merely enough to address the issue of structured inequality. Even existent measures can prove to be fatal if the issues of poverty and empowerment are not addressed simultaneously.

This ignored population would benefit from a system that would also keep provision for skills-based assessment for employment, despite holding a degree. A priority towards technical education also needs to be emphasised and weighed by all levels of institution, so that these individuals don’t draw a line in the sand when they’re envisioning a bright, happy future.

*As a veteran of SHOUT and a present desk clerk in the same institution, Nazifa mostly spends her days wondering what leisure even means. Send her your commiserations at nazifa@thedailystar.net*



# SHOUT Quiz: Which iconic Bangla commercial are you?

## DURDANA KAMAL

Let us take a trip down memory lane. Remember those colourful commercials that used to pop up on our TV screens every time we sat down to watch a *natok*? Remember the cute little jingles and how they would refuse to leave your head afterwards?

Vintage advertisements bring back a lot of nostalgia. I think they were onto something when they said old is gold, at least when it comes to TV ads.

Therefore, dear reader, join me in this curious mental exercise. What if every human being could personally identify with an ad? To find out, take the quiz below.

**1. What do you like to consume the most?**

- a. Sweet stuff
- b. My taste is diverse, like the cast of *Eternals*
- c. Fizzy drinks
- d. Something complicated and full of flavour

**2. What characteristic best describes your personality?**

- a. Romantic, soulful, adventurous
- b. Impulsive, dramatic, silly
- c. Cute, playful, charming
- d. Exciting, life of the party, loved by everyone

**3. Which season do you prefer?**

- a. Winter



b. Who cares about the season, when my life is so hard?

- c. Spring
- d. Summer

**4. Your significant other is mad at you. What do you do?**

a. No matter what happens, our bond will always remain intact.

b. I assume the worst and upset myself. I self-implode and make the situation more tense than necessary.

c. I act cute to make my partner smile, and that usually works. I can make him/her melt within minutes.

d. I do a dance performance and put on a big show to redeem myself. Nobody can ever beat my gestures!

**5. What's your favourite colour?**

- a. Blue
- b. White
- c. Red
- d. All the colours. All of them!

**6. What is your favourite movie genre?**

- a. Romance
- b. Drama
- c. Comedy
- d. Musical

If your choices were mostly a's, you are

"Tumi, ami ar Danish". Yes, Danish! You are sweet, adventurous and fiercely romantic. You remain loyal to your loved ones. You love to go on adventures and look at the beautiful sky. You are like the extra bit of goodness that makes life better!

If your choices were mostly b's, you are "Ke ei Ifad?" You are impulsive and jump to conclusions, depending on things that might or might not mean anything. You upset yourself over the smallest things. You get insecure when your loved ones are not giving you enough attention. You are malleable and mould into different situations easily.

If your choices were mostly c's, you are "Tomar jonno morte pari, o shundori, tumi golar mala..." You have an amazing sense of humour. You are playful, cute and like having fun with your friends. You have a certain charm about you that people find irresistible, like a refreshing drink on a hot, summer day!

If your choices were mostly d's, you are "Desh, desh, desh!" Everyone wants you around. You have a delightful energy and you remind people of all the good things in life -- colours, festivals, music and laughter. You are the life of the party!

*Durdana Kamal likes to do things which mostly have no purpose whatsoever. Contact her at [kamal.durdana@gmail.com](mailto:kamal.durdana@gmail.com)*

# The Crazy World of Celebrity Boxing

## SYED TAMJID TAZWAR

The widely publicised match between Logan Paul and KSI in late 2019 started a new era for celebrity boxing where YouTubers and influencers, without any former fighting experiences, go head to head in the ring, pulling punches and breaking noses to settle their feuds.

The competitors range from TikTokers, YouTubers to professional basketballers, MMA fighters, comedians, and everyone in between. Last June, Logan Paul took on legendary boxer Floyd Mayweather in Florida, in a record-breaking exhibition bout and was astonishingly able to last eight rounds without getting knocked out. The YouTuber is now setting his sights even higher, with news circulating of a potential brawl with

"Iron Mike" Mike Tyson.

So, are media personalities breaking down each other a thing now? Should you care?

Professionals in the boxing arena and hardcore fans will say that these matches are hurting the image of this sport and aren't nearly as entertaining. Some might think throwing punches is instinctive, and everyone can do it, however, there is more to it. The fame and follower counts of these influencers don't magically transform into elite

fighting capabilities in the ring, and a lot of these matches end up as a disappointment for the viewers, not offering everything they promise leading up to the fights.

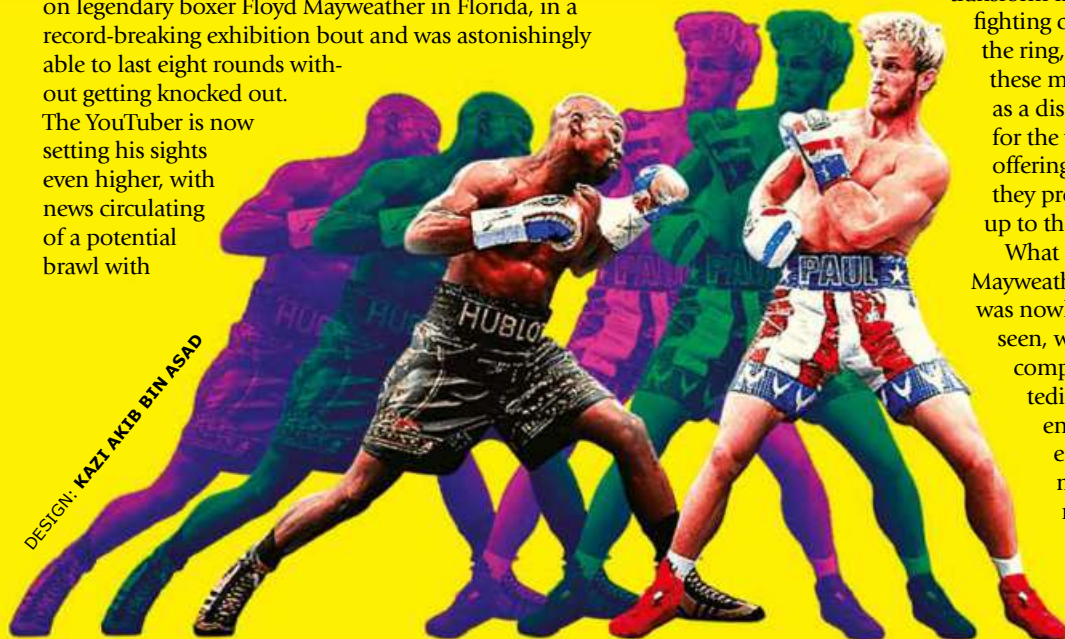
What Logan Paul vs Mayweather promised was nowhere to be seen, with viewers complaining it was tedious and not entertaining enough. In many ways, most of the amusement couldn't find its

way into the ring. The hype on the internet leading up to the fight, Logan Paul sporting a Pokémon card chain worth 150,000 dollars or Mayweather teasing his OnlyFans debut, the boomer digs aimed at the Paul brothers, and the memes – these were way more entertaining than the actual fight.

Nevertheless, seeing your favourite YouTuber and influencers in the ring is quite a spectacle and might be an enjoyable experience for the Logans and KSI armies of the world and might even pull them towards the sport in the long run and expand the boxing fan base.

However, amateurs getting the opportunities to participate in such colossal fights might come off as a bummer for real professionals, who train from a young age and go through hundreds of matches before finally stepping into the big ring. Although the financial side may help promoters overlook these problems, too much dependence on these matches might actually hurt the sport. The hype and the excitement built up around these fights on social media cannot turn these matches into the elite brawls that some viewers might expect.

Despite the outcomes, it's noteworthy that the competitors do go through countless hours of training and hard work before the fight. The fact that Logan Paul survived eight rounds without getting knocked out is remarkable on his part. His young brother Jake Paul releasing his primal rage against former MMA fighters and winning was also as impressive. These results might have also encouraged the former Vine influencers to join the professional scene, as Jake Paul so graciously said, "GOTCHA CAREER!"





# Where the Lost Ones Go

**RIFAH TASHFIA**

There was a letter from Yana's grandmother on her nightstand. Which was weird, because just ten minutes ago, she and her parents stood on their porch as her grandmother drove away. Why would she leave a letter? Picking it up, Yana turned it over to see her name scribbled on top. Inside, with neat handwriting:

Dear Yana,

Moving into a town as small as this – I was called preposterous, amongst other things.

You see, I regret doing a lot of things in my life. Looking back, I see things I should have done, things I should have avoided, things I could have stopped from happening. But I never regretted coming to Aelmere.

There's a scarlet journal I have in my bookshelf. It is a decades old diary left to me by my mother. I didn't pick it up for a long time after she left. But when I did, I found unspoken wishes yet to be fulfilled. I saw the whisper of a place where she had once wandered to. A place my mother visited once in her lifetime; never found her way back there again. Yet, a place she remembered forever.

I wanted to see her city of dreams. So I packed and left – I felt bad when I did. But more than that, I was excited to embark on a new journey.

I could've told you this while I was visiting you guys, I know! But I am leaving you this because you remind me so much of myself. You understand.

I hear you. When you feel lost, you know

where to come.

Yours Forever,  
Dadu

If someone asked Yana if she was crazy enough to pack up and go someplace over a heartfelt letter, she would say no – but that wouldn't be true, and her grandmother knew it.

So Yana found herself driving by the signboard that says *Welcome to Aelmere*. There was a quote under it that said "Where the lost ones go." in a fancy font.

The town was pretty – Yana couldn't deny it. Coming from busy Alynthi, this place was so quiet, peaceful. She rolled down the windows and let the breeze hit her face. The pavements were lined with groomed trees, and the storefronts were decorated colorfully. The autumn sky is a bright shade of blue with big white clouds like cotton candy. At last, she drove into a neighborhood and stopped in front of her grandmother's house.

\*\*\*

Later in her new room that night, Yana pulled the white wooden chair back. The chair scratched against the wooden floor. Taking her seat, her bony fingers traced along the rough spines of the antique journals. Her grandmother had rented one of the oldest houses in Aelmere, no doubt. Every nook and corner of the house seemed to creak when she moved.

Her cat hopped on the table and landed beside her hands.

"Right. Leave it in the past," Yana said

aloud. Sometimes, it felt like Yuki understood Yana the way humans could not.

She opened the scarlet journal Dadu handed her earlier and smoothed the withered pages with the palm of her hand.

"Writing it down, and leaving it here forever. A place of forlorn memories."

Picking up her pen, she wrote:

*The night went on, silent as ever. The city was fast asleep. The sound of void rang in her ears; hollow. Beneath the covers of her thick blanket, she was sweating, yet too afraid to pull it off.*

*Tears streamed down her face. Teeth clenched and lips clamped shut so she wouldn't make a sound. In case anyone was listening, at all.*

*Prayers murmured off against her mouth, "Please. Let me sleep." Thinking sleep will help her escape the dark thoughts that drive around her mind.*

*Little did she know.*

*When sleep finally came, nightmares tagged along. She woke up from some of the worst nightmares she had ever seen; the ones that gripped her heart tightly even when the sun was out, shining brightly.*

*When does this end?*

*...if it does?*

Closing the journal shut, the pen slipped off her fingers. Yana rubbed her face, failing to stifle a sigh. Yuki pawed her elbow and jumped on her lap. Petting the black cat absentmindedly, she looked outside the window.

The city was sleeping. Lights were off, moonlight was cascading throughout the town. A few streetlamps flickered here and there. A dog barked somewhere, while a siren went off. Silence, except for the sound of wind as it sailed by. The hours never seemed to pass. Somehow everything was going too fast and too slow at the same time. Yana was stumbling between the game of time, unable to hold herself strong. Her mind was playing dangerous games; and she was losing.

She forced herself to think of the red sign board that said *Aelmere, Where the lost ones go* and the names of some poets scribbled below. If the words in the letter she had received from her grandmother were any true, then this is the place she would like to spend her forever in.

When Yana finally went to sleep, there was a white dessert box lying on her bed. Their neighbours had brought them some, after hearing about their new "friend". It was from their bakery, *Lemon & Berries*. Yana had never seen this kind of courtesy from the neighbors in Alynthi. They pointedly ignored one another if they ever came into view.

Bringing a lemon cupcake to her lips, she took a bite.

A smile formed at her lips, and then the corner of her eyes. Maybe Aelmere was the right decision.

*The writer is a student of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College.*



ILLUSTRATION: TAHSIN MOSTAFA CHOWDHURY





# LETTER BOX

As life became easier with the help of modern technology, many things have been lost from our lives. One such lost item is the letter box. To be fair, the letter boxes are still there. We just stopped writing to each other.

PHOTOS & TEXT:  
MD SABBIR

